



SAFE

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

News and Events March 2025



March is National Social Worker Appreciation Month. Thank you, social workers, for all you do for our community!

THE BIG STORY

Record Drug Overdose Decline: Much Progress, Long Road Ahead for Prevention and Recovery Support



2,125 flags fly in Norfolk to commemorate the number of overdose deaths in Massachusetts in 2023.

The CDC reports significant declines in fatal overdoses in Massachusetts, nearly a 30% change between 2023 and 2024, well above the national average. Despite the positive change, experts on the front lines say the news could create decelerations in much-needed infrastructural change.

The news is part of new findings [reported by the CDC](#), which says deaths from drug overdose in the U.S. significantly declined between 2022 and 2023. A total of 20 states have seen a drop in overdose fatalities, some by as much as 54%. The data covers

drug-related homicides and intentional and unintentional suicides across a range of substances with abuse potential.

"The CDC's findings are certainly good news, but we're seeing a number of alarming indicators on the rise right now that are directly related to substance use, overdose, and harm prevention," says SAFE Director of Collaborative Care Chavelyn Santana.

"Trafficking rates, the number of unhoused, the number of missing people, increases in synthetic cannabis with the first overdoses being reported—many risk and protective factors for preventing misuse and maintaining sobriety are getting worse."

SAFE co-founder and Director of Family Recovery Jim Derick has concerns that the findings will slow desperately needed reforms to systems of care. "The [reported decline in overdose rates] minimizes the experiences of people still impacted, people with repeated overdose, or families who have lost a loved one," says Derick. "And the data doesn't reflect the experience of people moving through systems of care right now who are still not being sufficiently supported."

Still, the CDC remains hopeful. They link the change to improved harm-reduction strategies, overdose response systems, and the work of local and state organizations, like SAFE Coalition. "[O]ur partnerships with public safety colleagues in every state mean that we are more rapidly identifying emerging drug threats and supporting public health prevention and response activities in communities across America," says Allison Arwady, MD, MPH, Director of CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

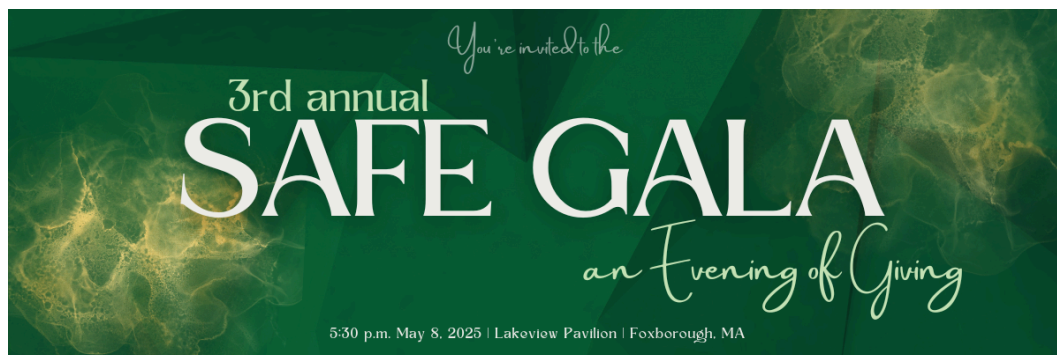
While this national decline is encouraging news, there is more work to be done.

Overdose remains the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18-44, highlighting the importance of sustained efforts to ensure this progress continues.

Stigma around substance use remains one of the biggest barriers to funding, equitable access to care, and recovery support. "In everything we do, we strive to give voice and support to people who may not otherwise get it, and to change a society that stigmatizes the conditions that take lives every single day," says Derick.

"SAFE is a community's expression that someone's recovery matters," says Derick. "Here is where we publicly acknowledge recovery in a way that our society just doesn't do elsewhere."

NEWS AND NOTICES



Tickets are going fast! Secure your seat for SAFE's 3rd Annual Gala.

**5:30 p.m. Thursday, May 8
Lakeview Pavilion (Foxborough)**

Gourmet dinner, live music, empowering speakers (including [Blink](#) podcast creator Jake Haendel), and exciting silent and live auctions. Help us break down barriers to

treatment and support across Massachusetts.

[Purchase Tickets](#)

Join SAFE's Newest Group: Sober Moms Club

7–8 p.m. each Thursday

SAFE Office (31 Hayward St. Suite 2C, Franklin)

Are you a mom navigating or exploring an alcohol-free and/or substance-free life? This group is here for you!

No requirements to join. Moms from all recovery paths and programs are welcome as well as moms looking for a safe and supportive environment to socialize with other moms.

[Join the Club](#)

Dispose of Unneeded Medications: Saturday, April 26

As part of the DEA's National Prescription Drug Take Back day, SAFE will host drive-thru disposal stations in multiple towns:

- 9–11 a.m. SAFE Office (31 Hayward St., Franklin)
- 9–11 a.m. Norfolk Police Department (14 Sharon Ave.)
- 9–11 a.m. Medway Town Hall (155 Village St.)
- 11 a.m.–1 p.m. Wrentham Town Hall (79 South St.)

[Learn More](#)

Receive Free Narcan Training

Join an upcoming 20-minute SAFE Narcan training to learn how to administer this life-saving medication, open to the public and no registration required.

Upcoming Trainings

- Saturday, March 29, 3–4 p.m. at Bowden Library (Foxborough)
- Wednesday, April 2, 10–11 a.m. at Norfolk Public Library
- Thursday, April 3: Training + drop-in meetings with a SAFE clinical social worker
 - 10–11:30 a.m. at Medway Public Library
 - 1–2:30 p.m. at Fiske Public Library (Wrentham)

[See all upcoming dates and request training for yourself or a group.](#)

SAFE SPOTLIGHT:
SOCIAL WORK TEAM



The month of March is Social Worker Appreciation Month! To our incredible social workers Alli Stokowski and Stephanie Heath and social worker-in-training, Oomiya Kawas: your compassion changes lives every day.

You listen when others won't, advocate when systems fail and support our clients through their toughest moments. And it's not just our clients who benefit from your support—the team at SAFE reap the benefits of your calm and stable support in so many ways.

Your collective dedication doesn't just fulfill our mission—it transforms our community. Thank you for all you do!

FAMILY RECOVERY CORNER

INSIGHT FROM INSIDE THE CRISIS: DON'T LET THE NUMBERS FOOL YOU



As *FIRST Steps Together's* [*Ribbons of Recovery*](#) project demonstrates, recovery is often a long and complicated journey requiring many different forms of support.

By Robyn Heisey

In February, the CDC reported a nearly 24% decline in drug overdose deaths in the United States for the 12 months ending in September 2024. But what does that statistic mean to people with lived experience of addiction and overdose?

Twice a year, those of us who have lost loved ones to addiction, have loved-ones who suffer from addiction, or both, march and attend drug awareness events. We listen to and tell heartbreaking stories. We pray. We contact our legislatures to lobby for a system that supports and treats to wellness, all who want to live a life free of the albatross of addiction.

And with the current dismantling of programs that assist the otherwise vulnerable people of this country, many of us wonder about the future of addiction and recovery support.

Settling in to talk about the truth behind these numbers at a local café with Jim Derick, co-founder of SAFE, he reflects on the structural issues that remain unaddressed in so many support systems for people experiencing substance use.

"In 2024, we flooded communities in and around Franklin with thousands of doses of Narcan," Jim explains, "and the success in harm-reduction shows. But it diverts the public's attention from recognizing an entirely broken system of care for those suffering from addiction."

Jim's own son Jack survived two overdoses prior a fatal overdose on July 15th, 2022. Three months sober from opioids at the time, Jack's tolerance had diminished, leaving him with a high likelihood of overdose. Because he had tested positive for THC, Jack was dismissed from his sober home, left on the street with no resources for further care.

Even in mental health facilities, which are regulated in Massachusetts, Jack was regularly prematurely released when deemed no longer harmful to himself or others. He would be handed a carbon-copy, barely legible treatment plan, an 800-number for substance and psychiatric needs, a diagnosis, and a handful of prescriptions. These would be dropped into a Hefty bag with the rest of his belongings.

Although the number of opioid-related-overdose deaths has decreased due to Narcan, this success in harm-reduction by no means addresses the root cause of those suffering from addiction. For those suffering from addiction, our healthcare system remains outdated and and inadequate, often providing insufficient treatment—along with resources to help the person either build or rebuild a sober, productive life for themselves, post treatment.

We must not turn a blind eye, believing that a few sprays of Narcan are the panacea to addiction. If the disease of addiction is nobody's fault, then why are those with addiction treated with neglect and derision? Why are people in such dire shape physically, mentally, and emotionally, turned out to the streets with garbage bags and little to no treatment plan—and hope? Imagine the streets free of dormant bodies being poked at and asked, "Are you all right?"

We need to start by building a system that lifts all. All deserve a warm room, clean sheets. All deserve a chance to contribute to society. All deserve a give and receive love.

All deserve a reason to live for something other than the next dose.

Family Recovery Weekly Schedule

Mondays: The Ripple Effect sibling support group, 7–8 p.m. on Zoom. Meeting ID: 831 8134 8873

Tuesdays: Families Anonymous, 6:30–8 p.m. at SAFE and [online](#)

Wednesdays: Postpartum Support Group, noon–1:30 p.m. at Bernon Branch YMCA, and 6:30–8 p.m. online. [Registration required.](#)

Thursdays: Sober Moms Club, 7–8 p.m. at SAFE. [Join the club.](#)

2nd & 4th Thursdays: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, 6:30–7:30 p.m. at Bernon Branch YMCA

Fridays: SAFE Cafe drop-in hours, 8:30 a.m.–noon at SAFE

1st & 3rd Saturdays: Saturday Solace mindfulness and stretching class, 8:30–9:30 a.m. at SAFE. [Registration required.](#)

Get Support

SAFE 2025 GALA CORNER

Members of Boston's Me2/Orchestra to Perform at May 8th Gala



Members of Me2/Orchestra will perform at the SAFE Gala on May 8th.

An ensemble from Boston's Me2/Orchestra will perform at the [3rd annual SAFE Gala](#) on May 8th. As the world's only classical music organization created for individuals with mental

illnesses and the people who support them, Me2/ ("Me Too") aims to be a model for creating inclusive environments for people with and without mental illness.

Ronald Braunstein, an award-winning conductor and former Julliard music director, and his wife started the group for people with mental illness and those who support them. Braunstein was called to start the nonprofit following his own diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

"We enjoy stripping away the elitism that surrounds most classical music performances," says the group. "Our goal is to create an environment where people can really enjoy themselves."

The New England-based orchestra has expanded to include ensembles around the country that all have the same focus of ending the stigma around mental illness. Visit the [Me2/ website](#) to learn more.

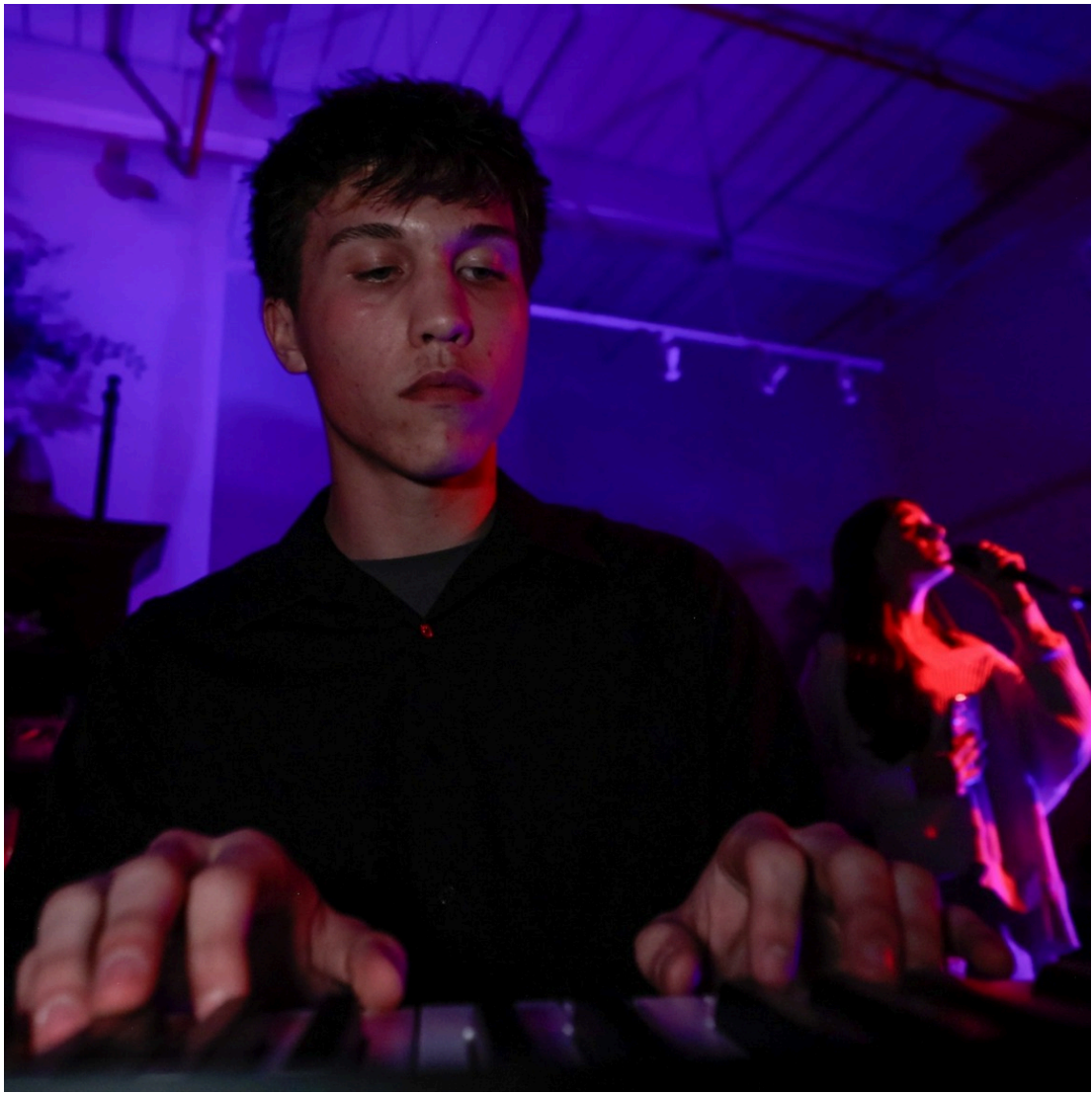
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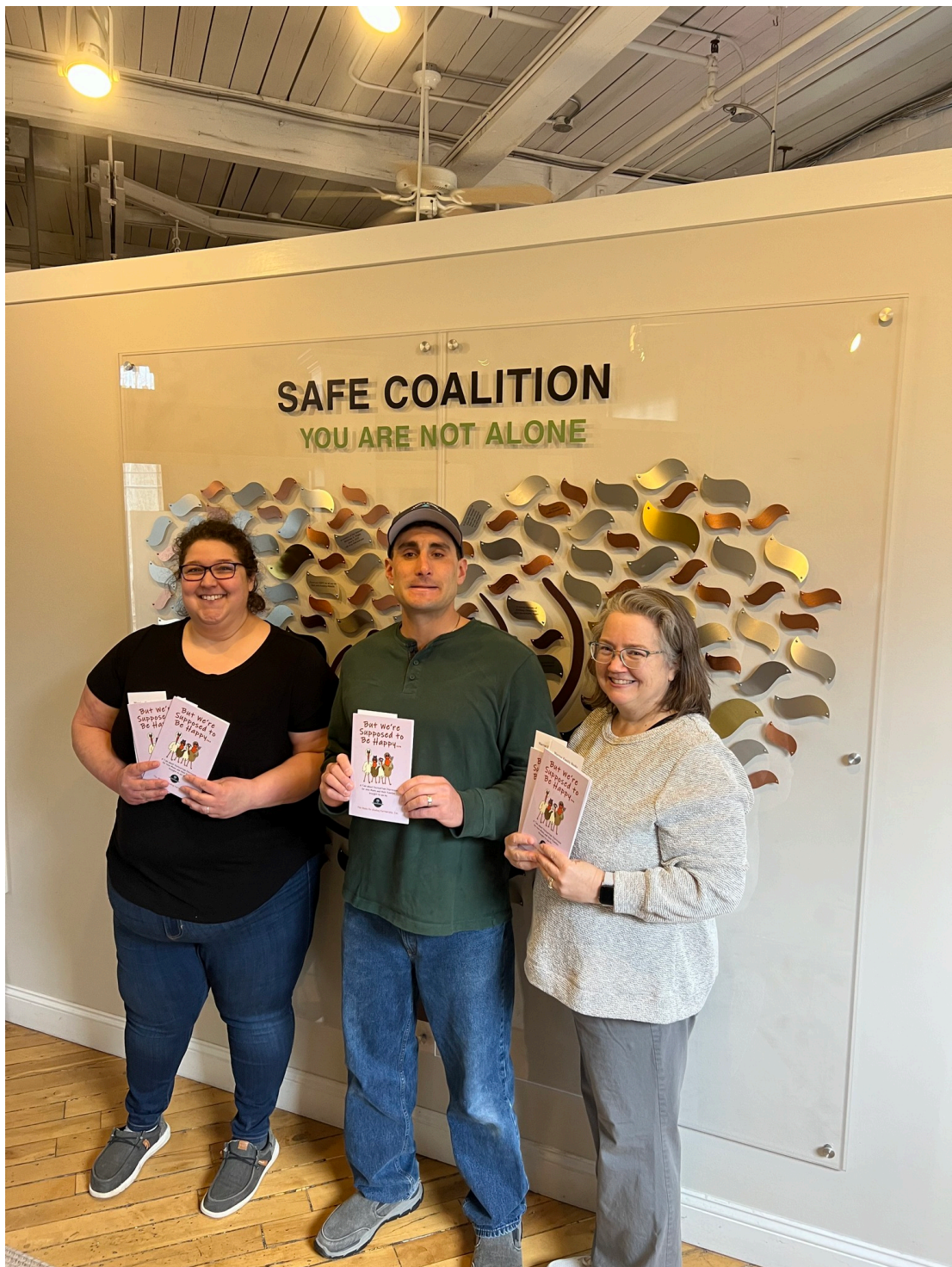
THIS MONTH AT SAFE

Just a slice of what we've been up to: Jeff Roy, The Oh My's, Aida and Jack, and our headliner Chad Hollister and Primo, all played to a packed house at SAFE Cafe After Dark. Jeff Lefko Books' "Books for Healing Partnership" donated their brand new book *But We're Supposed to Be Happy* for use in our Postpartum Support Group. We had a great meeting with Norfolk County Commissioner Richard Staiti. We hosted a field trip from the Legal and Protective Services Shop at Tri-County Regional High School. And Cheryl Hobbs along with Jill's Events, held a Galentine's Day Sip, Shop and Love event, donating the raffle proceeds to SAFE! Thank you!









YOU WERE GIVEN
this life
BECAUSE YOU ARE
Strong enough
TO LIVE IT







Help us continue our life-changing work Make
your gift to SAFE today

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